

**Thomas Jefferson to Peregrine Fitzhugh, June 4, 1797,
The Works of Thomas Jefferson in Twelve Volumes.
Federal Edition. Collected and Edited by Paul Leicester
Ford.**

TO PEREGRINE FITZHUGH J. MSS.

Philadelphia, June 4, 1797.

Dear Sir, —I am favoured with yours of May 19, & thank you for your intentions as to the corn & the large white clover which if forwarded to mr. Archibald Stuart at Staunton will find daily means of conveyance from thence to me. That indeed is the nearest post road between you & myself by 60. or 70. miles, the one by Georgetown being very circuitous.

The representatives have at length got through their address. As you doubtless receive the newspapers regularly from hence you will have seen in them the address, & all the amendments made or proposed (while mentioning newspapers it is doing a good office to as distant places as yours & mine to observe that Bache has begun to publish his *Aurora* for his country customers on 3. sheets a week instead of six. You observe that the 1st & 4th pages are only of advertisement. The 2d & 3d contain all the essays & laws. He prints therefore his 2d & 3d. pages of Monday's & Tuesday's papers on opposite sides of the same sheet, omitting the 1st & 4th, so that we have the news pages of 2. papers on one. This costs but 5. instead of 8. dollars & saves half the postage. Smith begins in July to publish a *weekly* paper without advertisements which will probably be a good one. Cary's paper is an excellent one & Bradford's compiled by Lloyd perhaps the best in the city; but both of these are daily papers. Thinking this episode on newspapers might not be unacceptable in a position as distant as yours, I return to Congress & to politics.) You will perceive by the votes that the Republican majority of the last congress has been much

Library of Congress

affected by the changes of the late election. Still however if all were here the majority would be on the same side, though a small one. They will now proceed to consider what is to be done. It is not easy nor safe to prophecy, but I think the expectation is that they will not permit the merchant vessels to arm, that they will leave the militia as it stands for the present season, vote further sums for going on with the fortifications & frigates & prefer borrowing the money of the bank to the taking up the subject of taxation generally at this inconvenient

season. In fact I consider the calling of Congress so out of season an experiment of the new administration to see how far & on what lines they could count on its support. Nothing new had intervened between the late separation & the summons, for Pinckney's non-reception was then known. It is possible from the complexion of the President's speech that he was disposed or perhaps advised to proceed on a line which would endanger the peace of our country: & though the address is nearly responsive yet it would be too bold to proceed on so small a majority. The first unfavorable event, & even the necessary taxes, would restore preponderance to the side of peace. The nomination of the envoys for France does not prove a thorough conversion to the pacific system. Our greatest security perhaps is in the impossibility of either borrowing or raising the money which would be necessary. I am suggesting an idea on the subject of taxation which might perhaps facilitate much that business & reconcile all parties. That is to say, to lay a land tax leviable in 1798 &c. But if by the last day of 1798 any state bring it's *whole* quota into the federal Treasury, the tax shall be suspended one year for that state. If by the end of the next year they bring another year's tax, it shall be suspended a 2d year as to them & so *toties quoties* forever. If they fail, the federal collectors will go on of course to make their collection. In this way those who prefer excises may raise their quota by excises, & those who prefer land taxes may raise by land taxes, either on the federal plan, or on any other of their own which they like better. This would tend, I think, to make the general government popular & to render the state legislatures useful allies & associates instead of rivals, & to mollify the harsh tone of government which has been asserted. I find the idea

Library of Congress

pleasing to most of those to whom I have suggested it. It will be objected to by those who are for a consolidation. You mention the retirement of Mr. Ames. You will observe that he has sent us a successor Mr. H. G. Otis as rhetorical as himself. You have perhaps seen an attack made by a Mr. Luther Martin on the facts stated in the *Notes on Virginia* relative to Logan, his speech, the fate of his family & the share Col. Cresap had in their exter-

-mination. I do not desire to enter the field in the newspapers with Mr. Martin, but if any injury has been done Col. Cresap in the statement I have given it shall certainly be corrected whenever another edition of that work shall be published. I have given it as I have received it. I think you told me Cresap had lived in your neighborhood hence I have imagined you could in the ordinary course of conversations in the societies there find the real truth of the whole transaction & the genuine character and conduct of Cresap. If you will be so good as to keep this subject in your mind, to avail yourself of the opportunities of enquiry & evidence which may occur, & communicate the result to me you will singularly oblige me. The proceedings in the federal court of Virginia to overawe the communications between the people & their representatives excite great indignation. Probably a great fermentation will be produced by it in that state. Indeed it is the common cause of the confederacy as it is one of their courts which has taken the step. The charges of the federal judges have for a considerable time been inviting the grand juries to become inquisitors on the freedom of speech, of writing & of principle of their fellow-citizens. Perhaps the grand juries in the other states as well as in that of Virginia may think it incumbent in their next presentment to enter protestations against this perversion of their institution from a legal to a political engine, & even to present those concerned in it. The hostile use which is made of whatever can be laid hold of of mine, obliges me to caution the friends to whom I write, never to let my letters go out of their own hands lest they should get into the newspapers. I pray you to present my most friendly respects to your father, & wishes for the continuance of his health & good faculties, to accept yourself assurances of the esteem with which I am dear sir your most obedt & most humble servt.